

Duckworth Joins Brown, Baldwin In Applauding Biden Administration Effort To Distribute Free Masks To Americans, Urging Prioritization Of American-made

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) this week joined U.S. Senators Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and more than a dozen of their Senate colleagues in calling on President Joe Biden to prioritize the purchase of masks made in the U.S. with U.S. materials, ensuring that American taxpayer dollars are

being spent on American products made by American workers. This letter follows this week's [announcement](#) by President Biden that he is following through on his commitment to provide hundreds of millions of high-quality masks at no-cost to Americans, and that the first distribution of masks will come as soon as next week from masks that are currently housed in the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS).

“Purchasing NIOSH approved N95 respirators and other high-quality masks, such as FDA-authorized surgical masks, made by American workers here in the U.S. advances our shared goals for supporting domestic manufacturing and ensuring a more reliable, consistent supply chain for these essential products,” the Senators wrote. “Doing so not only helps to prevent further loss of life, keep our kids in school, and ensure our economy remains open, but it will also ensure that the United States maintains a robust PPE manufacturing capacity so that we are never again in a situation where we must be dependent on foreign-made products, like we were in the early days of the pandemic.”

Duckworth, Brown and Baldwin were joined on the letter to President Biden by U.S. Senators Tim Kaine (D-VA), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Ed Markey (D-MA), Jon Tester (D-MT), Alex Padilla (D-CA), Catherine Cortez-Masto (D-NV), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Tina Smith (D-MN), Chris Murphy (D-CT), Bob Casey (D-PA), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Jack Reed (D-RI), Gary Peters (D-MI) and Dianne Feinstein (D-CA).

The full text of the letter is available [here](#) and below:

Dear President Biden:

We are encouraged by your commitment to make “high-quality masks” available to Americans at no-cost, starting as early as next week with an initial distribution of adult masks from the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS). As your Administration enters into contracts to replenish the SNS and purchase additional masks to distribute to adults and children across the country, we strongly urge you to take clear steps that prioritize long-term contracts for the purchase of masks made by American workers in the U.S. with U.S. materials. American taxpayer dollars should support high-quality products made in America by American workers. Period.

As you know, American companies have stepped up throughout the past two years, retooling manufacturing lines to help compensate for supply chain weaknesses and to meet the need for essential products, including N95 respirator masks and other personal protective equipment (PPE). These companies saved American lives. Thanks to the entrepreneurship and patriotism of these U.S. companies and their workers, we now have dozens more manufacturers of N95 respirators and other high-quality masks based

here in the United States than we did before the pandemic, when less than 10 percent of N95 respirators were manufactured domestically. The nationwide and global reports of PPE shortages at the beginning of the pandemic underscore the necessity of maintaining domestic PPE production capability.

Despite the urgent need for high-quality, American made products, too many U.S.-based PPE manufacturers are struggling to exist as health systems and other major purchasers of PPE choose to purchase cheaper, lower-quality masks and other supplies from China. In fact, the American Mask Manufacturer's Association estimates that nearly 6,000 of the approximately 8,000 jobs that were created by U.S. mask manufacturers have since disappeared, due to the lack of support that these companies have received due to the continued purchase of foreign made - particularly Chinese-made-products. Regrettably, a key reason this part of the industry was offshored pre-COVID was because price was the predominant factor in purchasing. We must not compromise the health of Americans by making purchases based mainly on lowest cost. Purchasing PPE made by American workers here in the U.S. supports domestic manufacturing and helps ensure a more reliable, consistent supply chain for these essential products. It is imperative that the federal government prioritize domestic manufacturers when purchasing masks and other PPE with taxpayer dollars – not just to support American manufacturers and their workers who are eager to deliver high-quality masks, but to ensure the health and safety of Americans.

Unlike their KN95 competitors, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)-certified American N95 respirator masks must meet rigorous standards and offer excellent protection against COVID-19 transmission. According to a recent article in the Wall Street Journal, it “will take 25 hours for an infectious dose of COVID-19 to transmit between people wearing non-fit-tested N95 respirators. If they’re using tightly sealed N95s – where only 1% of particles enter the facepiece – they will have 2,500 hours of protection.” The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued a warning that approximately 60 percent of KN95 respirators in the U.S. are counterfeit, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has raised quality concerns with healthcare providers about Chinese-made PPE. Recognizing the risk that lower-quality, potentially counterfeit products pose to the health and national security of Americans, Congress acted in December 2021 to prohibit U.S. Department of Defense from purchasing any PPE – including masks – from China (Public Law No. 117-81, sec. 802) or other non-allied nations. Congress also provided \$10 billion in the American Rescue Plan for the federal government to purchase needed medical supplies, including N95 and other FDA-authorized masks. The entire United States government should hold itself to this higher standard that prioritizes American lives and American manufacturers over competition from China.

Purchasing NIOSH approved N95 respirators and other high-quality masks, such as FDA-authorized surgical masks, made by American workers here in the U.S. to fulfill your commitment to distribute hundreds of millions of free, high-quality masks to the American people advances our shared goals for supporting domestic manufacturing and ensuring a more reliable, consistent supply chain for these essential products. Doing so not only helps to prevent further loss of life, keep our kids in school, and ensure our economy remains open, but it will also ensure that the United States maintains a robust PPE manufacturing capacity so that we are never again in a situation where we must be dependent on foreign-made products, like we were in the early days of the pandemic. It also supports a healthy, stable supply chain for higher quality products, which offer superior protection against the transmission of COVID-19.

We strongly urge you to prioritize the use of federal taxpayer dollars for the procurement and distribution of domestically made PPE that meets high-quality standards from established, proven, and vetted suppliers in future purchases – including those meant to fulfill your recent commitment to provide American adults and children with access to no-cost high quality masks, as well as those to replenish the SNS following this initial distribution of masks.

Thank you for your strong leadership in these challenging times, and for your demonstrated commitment to supporting American businesses and workers.

Sincerely,